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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined a preschool classroom serving a child considered to be at-risk (i.e., with indications of prenatal drug exposure). For a period of one semester, the investigator collected field notes through observations and taped sessions with little direct interaction with the children. Taped discussions and interviews with the teacher and assistant were a part of the data collection, as were photographs of the physical environment. Data were analyzed and recommendations were made based on established research findings that support specific physical changes in the environment, as well as changes in teacher-child interactions. The purpose of the recommended adaptations was to create a more conducive learning environment for children exhibiting characteristics of drug exposure or who are easily over-stimulated. (Contains 17 references.) (Author/EV)

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CHANGING THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL CHILDREN

Celia E. Johnson and Rosalyn Anstine Templeton

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to examine a preschool classroom serving children consider to be at-risk. The study was a qualitative study written in the format of an educational criticism. For a period of one semester, the investigator collected field notes through observations and taped sessions with little direct interaction of the children. Taped discussions and interviews of the teacher and assistant were a part of the data collection as were photographs of the physical environment. Data were analyzed and recommendations were made based on established research findings that support specific physical changes in the environment, as well as changes in interactions. The purpose of the recommended adaptations was to create a more conducive learning environment for children exhibiting characteristics of drug-exposure or who are easily over stimulated.

KEY WORDS: Classroom environment, inclusion, classroom adaptations, children's learning, learning adaptations, drug-exposed children, pre-school learning environments, pre-school classrooms, children at-risk

1. Purpose

The purpose of this study was focused on three aspects affecting children's learning. The first goal was to analyze the behavior and learning of a child exhibiting characteristics associated with prenatal drug-exposure. Second, data were collected to examine the types of interactions that the teachers had with each other and the children, and how those interactions possibly affected behavior. The third focus of data collection was to provide information for analyzing the physical environment of a preschool classroom for its impact on learning.

2. Perspectives

Early childhood education in American schools is primarily supported for children identified as "at-risk." There are multiple factors that are considered when defining children at-risk that include poverty. During the 90s, our nation's children are growing up in poverty ranged

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from 16-20% (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1992; Children's Defense Fund, 2001); and teen parenthood. Furthermore, over 12.5% of American children are born to teenage mothers; these children are at the greatest risk of long-term poverty and are less likely to receive pre/postnatal care (Children's Defense Fund, 2001; Miller, 1989; United States Census Bureau, 1993; Voices for Illinois Children, 2002). Compounding these risk factors are those contributed by the maternal use of drugs during pregnancy (Chasnoff, 1998; Chasnoff, Anson, & Moss Iaukea, 1998).

Drug abuse occurs in all segments of society regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Based on data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Chasnoff, Anson, and Moss Iaukea (1998) conclude that the total number of infants born each year prenatally exposed to alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs is well over 1.5 million. These numbers are consistent with the trends established in the early nineties (Chasnoff, 1991; United States General Accounting Office, June, 1990; National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1995). In the late 90's, 1,000,000 children were born to mothers who illicitly used alcohol and drugs (Chasnoff, 1998). Programs for children positively identified as prenatally exposed to drugs have provided successful intervention that facilitates learning such as the program in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Chasnoff, Anson, & Moss Iaukea, 1998; Whitaker, Signorelli, & Ferkich, 1990; Waller, 1993). Because most children prenatally exposed to drugs are never diagnosed (Chasnoff, Anson, & Moss Iaukea, 1998; Waller, 1993), they are unlikely to "receive the special help they need in order to function effectively in the world (Waller, 1993, p. x)."

Children who have been positively identified as prenatally exposed to cocaine exhibit a wide range of behaviors upon entering the school environment (Chasnoff, Anson, & Moss

laukea, 1998; Kanne & Cole, 1991; Waller, 1993). Some children will have numerous problems while others may have few if any. Waller's (1993) interviews, with over 120 teachers having had experience with children exposed to cocaine, verified that although the children were "normally intelligent, and that some were gifted (p.26)" they had "unique learning problems and, ... very different behavior problems than they had previously seen (p.26)." The pervasive characteristics can be categorized as problems that are physical, related to learning, or with relationship formation. Physical problems include hyperactivity, gross and fine motor problems, inability to focus, impulsivity and violence, sleep disorders, and poor body awareness. Learning problems include language delays, attention problems, memory problems, lack of perseverance, susceptibility to stimulus overload, sensitivity to changes, no sense of cause and effect, no sense of limits, and difficulty making decisions. Problems of relationships include lack of affect, lack of communication, beliefs that others are out to get him/her, self-absorption, frequent lying and stealing, sudden mood swings, lack of conscience, and other inappropriate social behaviors (Chasnoff, Anson, & Moss laukea, 1998; Kanne & Cole, 1991, Griffith, 1992; Waller, 1993). Because of the results of poor socialization these children often become isolated and resentful, have few friends or role models, and experience worsened social skills (Waller, 1993).

Our problem in working with children exposed to drugs is not one of determining what kind of physical environment is most suitable and supportive for learning. Rather, the problem is multifaceted (Chasnoff, Anson, & Moss laukea, 1998). Because of the moral issues, stigma, legalities, and inability to positively identify all children exposed to drugs prenatally it is unlikely that we will ever have programs established solely for such children on a nationwide basis. Additionally, the movement in public education is to support the needs of all children in

regular classrooms. Therefore, based on these assumptions, the focus of this research has been on a child who exhibits the characteristics of drug-exposure as established in research with children positively identified as drug-exposed.

The primary focus of this study was on the behavior and learning of a child at risk of school failure. Noah, the child in this educational criticism, exhibited many characteristics often associated with prenatal drug-exposure. Noah lives with his maternal grandmother who indicated that she did not believe that her daughter was taking drugs during the time she was pregnant with Noah, but stated that her daughter was presently using drugs. We will never know whether Noah's behavior was the result of having been prenatally exposed to drugs; however, the characteristics exhibited by Noah can be addressed and help provided.

Help for Noah will only happen by changing approaches and strategies when working with children and by changing the classroom environment. Therefore, purpose of this research was also to analyze the environment and make suggestions for adapting the traditional early childhood classroom to fit Noah's special needs, and still be able to meet the needs of other children. Other participants focused on in this educational criticism include Noah's teachers, Tess Michaelson and Irma Wilson. They invited me into their classroom two days a week; as an observer, I began taping and taking field notes.

3. Method

It was the third week of school when I made my initial visit to this early childhood at-risk classroom. The classroom is situated in an urban school serving a majority for children from Caucasian families of lower socioeconomic background with 50% of the children qualifying for reduced or free lunch. This classroom had 16 children considered at risk of school failure. The

children attended class four mornings per week, Monday through Thursday. Fridays were reserved for home visits, professional meetings and teacher in-service, and preparation. Using qualitative methods, data were collected two mornings (Tuesday and Thursday) per week for one semester. The investigator wore a tape recorder at all sessions and took written field notes as she established her role as an observer. There was little direct interaction with the children, in fact, the children got so they basically ignored the investigator and treated her much like a piece of furniture. Tapes were transcribed and field notes analyzed. The focus was threefold, 1.) on the behavior and learning of four year old Noah, 2.) on the type of interactions of Noah's teachers, Tess and Irma, with each other, Noah, and other children in the classroom, and 3.) on the classroom's physical environment and its impact on children's behavior. The findings were reported and analyzed in the format of an educational criticism.

4. Description

Noah

Noah, a sturdy-looking, blonde haired, four-year-old, bounced around the room in perpetual motion. First, he was sitting on his knees on the carpet, but in the blink of an eye he was gone. Next, he was on the table growling like a tiger, but as I approached, he flashed by and slid across the floor. As he hit the carpet he began a roll then jumped up like a jack-in-the-box and continued bobbing up and down while shouting, "I want to paint! I want to paint!" His round, bright blue eyes flashed with excitement as he grabbed his clip board and jumped over to the chalkboard to put it away. Upon giving his teacher a quick hug he continued to spring off the floor and ran to the easel - his blue jeans streaking past three children sitting quietly on the carpet. Suddenly, he began crying when he saw two children at the easels. Walking toward him,

his teacher, Tess Michaelson, reminded him that he had chosen the quiet area because he wanted to play with the felt board people. Although he was crying he continued to shout, "I want to paint! I want to paint!" Tess tenderly held his hand while she finished planning with a few children. Noah's body began to relax and slow down. He began picking at his Power Ranger T-shirt and moved toward the easels. Next to the easels was the sand/water table filled with colored rice which caught his attention; he began to play in the rice. He poured rice into the funnel and watched it fall through, and then he grabbed a pan and used it to scoop the rice then shook it in front of Daniel's face. Noah turned, to see who was watching him, and in a flash he crawled into the sand table. He stood up. Then he bent down to his toes, scooped his hands full of rice, brought his hands over his head and dropped the rice. It spilled out onto the floor. As quickly as he got in the table he was now under it and began flipping the spilled rice over to the art table nearby. As the teacher assistant, Irma Wilson approached him, he jumped up and darted to the kitchen area, proceeded to remove his neon blinking Power Ranger shoes and emphatically stated, "I need help, I need help!" Such is the beginning of a pretty typical morning for Noah.

Noah's Teachers

While seated among the children at circle time on the carpet, Tess and Irma each had a child on their lap as they prepared to sing "A-Ram-Sam-Sam." When finished, the children were reminded by Tess to listen as they had a sharing time. Amanda became anxious about her untied shoe and in a tiny voice asked Tess if she would tie it for her. Tess encouraged the children to wait patiently, while Amanda tied the shoe herself. Tess talked about tying shoes and affirmed the pride one can take in this. Suddenly another child exclaims, "She's doing it all by herself!"

Irma has repositioned herself between two children who were unable to attend and participate in this sharing time. Tess and Irma each take a group of children and their clipboards to help them plan their activities for the morning.

At the art table Noah was shaking a funnel full of corn starch in Daniel's face. Tess intervened stating, "Funnels are for playing." Noah threw his smock at a hook, darted to the kitchen area and leaped like a frog onto the heating register. Tess, in quick pursuit commented, "It's okay to sit on chairs but not on the heater." Extending her hand to help Noah jump down she directed him to clean up the corn starch at the art table. Avoiding the request, Noah entertained himself in a mirror then reached into the guinea pig's home. Tess calmly sat him down, helped him make a lap, wrapped Alex, the guinea pig, and gave him to Noah who gently nuzzled, pet and kissed the furry little creature. Irma has been busy encouraging other children working in various areas around the room. She was heard stating to a child needing assistance, "Ask Kevin to help you, or Noah," at clean up time, "Kevin, clean up," and when a child got hurt, "David, don't yank arms."

Noah's Classroom

There were 16 children enrolled in Tess and Irma's classroom that measured 31.4 ft. by 16 ft. for a total of 502.4 square feet. Tess and Irma's classroom was bright, with large windows extending the length of one side of the room overlooking a wooded area. There were bright and interesting pictures and posters on the walls, colorful signs hung from the ceiling, shelves were filled with inviting and visually appealing toys and books; even the furniture was bright and varied in texture, sizes, and colors. Along the back wall was a shelf about five and a half feet above the floor extending the width of the classroom. Underneath the shelf were hooks used for

hanging plastic bags full of supplies. These bags were discretely covered by a blue curtain with a white floral print which hung from the shelf above. Attractive blue and white striped storage boxes were labeled according to theme and used to store other supplies in various places around the room, some being stacked and used to divide learning areas and centers. Most of these were at the end of shelving units to extend the divisions between learning centers.

The room was well organized and divided into six distinct areas designated by appropriately labeled (with words and pictures) large, colorful signs that hung from the ceiling. The shelves in the table toys and art area were full of blocks, puzzles, plastic animals, chain links, nuts and bolts, beads, staplers, paper punches, markers, scissors, and paper and pencils. The housekeeping and quiet areas were supplied with dress-up clothes and shoes, dolls, plastic food, books, felt board pieces, puppets, photo albums, and an aquarium which was home to Alex and Mini, the pet guinea pigs. Two easels and a sand/water table were also available for children to express their creativity. Children's personal items are kept in the adjacent hall in cubbies above their coat hooks.

The walls were covered by three large bulletin boards and an unused chalkboard all covered with a variety of borders and backgrounds that range from solid colors (yellow, blue, white) to bright prints and patterns (red & white checkered, cut out keys). Attached to the boards are posters, memos, schedules, a map of the United States, children's art work, and children's name tags with daily schedules. Posters are not only found on the walls, but on windows, doors, and shelving.

Observation of the class in session revealed children dressed in a variety of colors, grouped at various activities; some at tables pondering puzzles, science equipment or cutting and

gluing, some at easels creatively painting with paints and markers, some listening to music and singing, and some enjoying a snack picnic style on a blanket in a corner on the carpet. Others were in the quiet area retelling stories using the felt board and puppets, sharing a book, or looking at a photo album. Another group was preparing pizza for their pretend children because they were dressed in heels and blazers to go out on the town for dinner. Still others were building

castles and roads while a friend sat quietly nearby loving Alex, the guinea pig, wrapped in a towel in his lap.

5. Interpretation

The children were involved in many activities, talking to one another, discovering and evaluating information, and enjoying each other's company. They were excited about their accomplishments and often ran to Tess or Irma as they circulated around the room asking children about their work, answering questions, or shared in the children's excitement.

Noah

Just watching Noah stirred feelings of exhaustion. He had boundless energy that never seemed to be depleted. He exhibited behaviors that ranged between being very loving to impulsive and aggressive. For example, Noah was very loving with Alex, the guinea pig; impulsive when he stood on the table throwing rice, and aggressive when he shook the scoop in Daniel's face.

Noah had difficulty focusing on a task and his feelings seemed to fluctuate as rapidly as his position in the room. To illustrate, he had planned and was happy about playing in the quiet area with the felt board, but before he got there he suddenly began screaming that he wanted to

paint.

Described as a loner by his teachers, Noah preferred to play independently rather than with other children. When he slowed down long enough to interact with his peers, he ended up in a crisis or did not stay long enough to engage in meaningful interaction. Developmentally, his verbal skills were normal, but were often used inappropriately for name calling of peers and adults. His fine motor skills were average, but he sometimes had problems because of perseveration. There were inconsistencies of ability in his gross motor skills; he ran well and was an excellent climber, but had much difficulty pedaling a tricycle.

When Noah did stay on task, which was most often at the art table or painting, it was not uncommon for his perseverative behavior to become a challenge. For instance, while pretending to wrap a present for his grandma using shiny paper, tape, and glue, Noah pulled off about two feet of tape, which got stuck to his hand, shirt, and the table edge. Finally, he got the tape on the box and paper, and then impulsively grabbed the glue. First, he tried a little glue, was not satisfied, so he took the lid off and poured the glue until the whole bottle pooled on the package. At this point Noah began to add more paper as the glue oozed out and cascaded down the sides of the package onto the table. Noah was not able to limit himself and end the "doing" of the project.

Noah's Teachers

Tess Michaelson was sensitive to Noah's needs often holding his hand during transitional periods or other times when Noah needed more self-control. When Noah wanted to paint and his behavior was escalating out of control, Tess calmly held Noah's hand in a gentle yet firm manner that had a therapeutic effect, helping him slow his pace and calm down. Tess was able

to accept Noah's feelings of disappointment; she allowed him to cry and provided external controls which helped him physically calm down.

Pedagogically speaking, having appropriate expectations, and being able to stimulate motivation are integrally related to behavior management strategies employed by teachers. The caring manner and friendly nurturing that was evident in the way Tess interacted with her students supported a classroom relatively free of behavior problems. Her sensitivity to the individual needs of children was manifested in the timing of her interactions. For example, when Noah was wrapping the gift for his grandmother, his perseverative behavior produced a messy project. Tess moved in, picked up the gift, commented on his hard work, and suggested that it be put up to dry. Additionally, Tess focused on appropriate rather than inappropriate behavior, sometimes called the "can do" approach. Illustrating this was the time when Noah shoved the funnel in another child's face, Tess said, "Funnels are for playing." Her skills were demonstrated consistently throughout the daily sessions with the children as is evident in the following statements made at other times, "It's okay to sit on chairs but not on the heater." and "Wow, what's going on in the housekeeping area?" (this statement promoted language development rather than correcting student's behavior).

As a teacher assistant, Irma Wilson took direction from Tess in such a way that her skills complimented and supported the warm atmosphere in the classroom. She demonstrated understanding of the importance of consistency and often consulted with Tess on how to handle Noah when he got off task and was unable to focus. Irma circulated through the classroom, attended to the children as they worked, and encouraged independence by telling children to,

"Ask a friend to help you." By following Tess's example and by being receptive to her directions, Irma was able to bring continuity in discipline and support the established goals and expectations in this classroom.

Noah's Classroom

Actual usable area in Noah's classroom was 439.9 square feet which figured out to 27 square feet per child. Tess and Irma were quite creative in making the most of a small classroom. Storing the numerous materials needed to support a developmentally appropriate classroom can be challenging. Although some supplies were taken home for storage, the majority were conveniently kept at school for accessibility.

They created a stimulating environment that facilitated learning. For example, the classroom was appealing to all the senses. Toys and furniture were bright with many textures. There were hard chairs and soft bean bag chairs, hard flooring and plush carpeting. The room was alive with pets, plastic or wooden toys, blocks, puzzles, balls, hoola hoops, and tricycles. Shapes and colors were splashed everywhere. To illustrate, blue striped storage boxes were stacked and floral prints adorned the curtains. Bulletin boards had backgrounds with checkered patterns, cot out shapes for borders, and displayed colorful signs and posters. There were even boxes of crackers to eat for snacks while music played nearby.

The children could choose from many inviting things to do. There were six centers to play in, plus easels and a sand/water table. Each area was stocked with a variety of age appropriate materials - scissors that cut with zigzags and curves, puppets and dolls, puzzles of all kinds, books and photo albums to name but a few. Additionally, Tess and Irma provided many opportunities for children to build on various skills. The daily schedule included times for large

group activities, individual work time (in learning centers), small group activities, gross motor activities (in the gym or outside), and a story time.

The children took occasional visits to the library and several field trips throughout the year. Parents felt welcomed in this classroom and often came for the morning session or a part of the day. They played with their own children as well as others and, at times, even lead the children in singing songs. The environment fostered cohesive relationships because it was child and family centered and provided opportunities for the children to be actively involved. It was a developmentally appropriate, stimulating environment for any young child needing opportunities that would help him or her learn language, social skills, numbers, science, and other emergent literacy concepts that would be beneficial upon entering kindergarten.

6. Evaluation And Recommendations

Noah's Teachers

Tess's expectations of Noah are appropriate. In re-examining the time when Noah had chosen the quiet area then decided he wanted to paint, we saw that Noah did not have the internal control for self-regulation necessary to function appropriately, so Tess therapeutically held his hand. Although Tess was accepting of Noah's feelings, she could be more supportive by verbally affirming his feelings, helping him begin to understand himself. A statement such as, "I can tell you're disappointed that you cannot paint, Noah." would help him specifically identify his feelings and better understand the situation. This would help him begin to develop an awareness of his own feelings and prepare him to self-monitor when he is older. Accepting Noah's behavior, Tess intervened in a way the provided him with the controls he needed to continue to function.

Timing of intervention is critical when promoting the development of young children. When Noah was gluing the gift for his grandmother, Tess stepped in with praise for Noah on his creation. But let's take another look at this situation. Although Noah was allowed to be independent and messy, he was also stuck in repetitive behaviors of taping and gluing the package. Tess's intervention would have been more timely had she been there assisting and encouraging during the preparation rather than intervening in the knick of time. Children with perseverative behavior often end up disappointed and frustrated. They need more frequent interaction until they can self-regulate and come to a natural closure in an activity. Being aware of this would allow Tess to be more timely in her interactions with Noah during such activities.

Overall, Tess's skill level was outstanding. However, two recommendations would be to work on decoding feelings for the children and be more timely interactions with children having repetitive behavior.

Irma's caring and supportive attitude was evident in the way she took initiative circulating around the room and constantly encouraged and interacted with the children. Even though Irma was clear and direct in communicating expectations which helped the children avoid confusion, she was so focused on the task that she was often commanding the children rather than positively directing. Irma did address appropriate behaviors, but as a means of correcting inappropriate behavior. In other words, when she said, "Use quiet voices." it was her way of telling the children that they were too loud. Rather, Irma should guide the children in making the right choices by saying something such as, "I hear loud voices." or "My ears are hurting, I wonder why?" In this way, the children will be more responsive to her, making it less likely that she would have to withhold privileges. By helping the children identify problems,

Irma would be empowering them to make choices and feel more secure about their surroundings. Another recommendation for Irma is to deliberately acknowledge children when they don't need corrected then affirm and descriptively praise.

Irma's skills enhance the program goals and the achievements of the children. She demonstrates a caring and sensitive manner with the children that would be strengthened even more by identifying appropriate behaviors when they occur and guiding the children in problem solving.

Noah's Classroom

Children born prenatally exposed to drugs, considered hyperactive and whose nervous systems are easily over stimulated cannot progress in the traditional developmentally appropriate, stimulating early childhood classroom (Chasnoff, Anson, & Moss Iaukea, 1998; Waller, 1993). Studies on children prenatally exposed to drugs have provided information supporting specific conditions conducive to successful learning in preschool. This knowledge can be applied to learning environments serving children at risk who have characteristics similar to children prenatally exposed to drugs. Waller (1993), in her book, *Crack Affected Children: A Teacher's Guide* makes the following statement:

> Because crack-affected children are so sensitive to stimulation, the rich classroom... would distract them and make learning almost impossible. It would also very likely push them into hyperactivity because of the difficulty they have in coping with stimuli. Everywhere they look there's something that overloads their circuits. In such a classroom it would be very hard for them to regain control of themselves and calm down (p.61).

The ideal classroom for such children would be one just the opposite of Tess and Irma's classroom. It would be a stripped-down classroom; bare walls and empty bulletin boards, toys

out of sight with only a few for children to choose from, dim lighting with limited colors and patterns, sound absorbing (carpet & acoustical ceiling tiles) for limited noise, soft music with a gentle rhythm, and there should be a quiet area free of distractions and stimuli in which the teacher can work with children one-on-one (Jorgenson & Wehrmeister [no date], Waller, 1993).

Recognizing the dichotomy existing between the model early childhood environment (Tess and Irma's classroom) and that which facilitates learning for the child needing a much less stimulating environment, the following evaluations and recommendations are made. First, there is a need for more space. Noah's classroom supported 16 children (all considered at risk) and two adults in 439.9 square feet which translates into 27 square feet per child or approximately 24 square feet per person if you count the adults. The National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends a minimum of 35 square feet per child for typically healthy children (Bredekamp, 1997). Based on these numbers there should be no more than 12 children served in this room. However, according to state guidelines, 20 children could be placed in this classroom. Never-the-less, since space is limited, it is recommended that no more children be accepted or replaced in this classroom. One way to allow more personal space for Noah when he is working at the tables or eating lunch is to control the number of children seated on his side of the table.

Another significant observation is the need to control some of the visual stimuli. Based on Noah's inability to cope with normal levels of stimuli, it is recommended that the blue striped storage boxes be exchanged for solid colored boxes that will blend with the shelving units and walls. Likewise the floral print curtains used to eliminate visual stimuli on some shelves, should also be changed to a solid muted color and added to the open exposed shelves. Since the

classroom needs to be aesthetically pleasing to all the children, it is not feasible to remove all the posters or completely strip down the bulleting boards. The posters could be limited in number and contained to a specific area/wall, then rotated at different times during the year. All bulletin boards should have a neutral background with borders being a similar shade.

Tess efficiently and creatively used the limited space in setting up learning centers. In order to provide a truly quiet, low stimulus area it is recommended that the carpeted area serve a dual purpose and be used for activities that are presently in the quiet area. The book shelf could be turned around, have a curtain attached that could be flipped covering the books during circle time's opening and closing activities. The felt board is portable and can be moved to this area also. This would allow the present quiet area to be completely free of stimuli for Noah and other children to come when their nervous systems are overloaded and in need of calming down. Such a place could also serve as a teaching area for one-on-one instruction of new skills.

Considering auditory stimulation, during work time, music should be limited to uncomplicated simple selections. Children's music could be played during more structured activities such as large group time, with a caution to provide opportunity for Noah to calm down before proceeding to the next activity.

To limit the number of transitions and resolve scheduling challenges, one possibility would be to eliminate the small group activity as a separate time and incorporate it into an extended work time. The children could rotate through the structured small group activity just as they do through the different learning centers.

In summary, the adaptations recommended for the physical environment are to increase the allotted square footage per child by closing enrollment for the class, use curtains to conceal

more of the visual stimuli, create a very low stimulus quiet area, carefully select calming music, and incorporate the small group activity into the work time.

7. Thematics

During this study, two children did move bringing the number of children down to 14, and increasing the square feet per child. Tess and Irma did make some of the recommended changes to the physical environment. Changes were made to the bulletin boards and the number of posters was decreased cutting back on visual stimuli. We had discussions on how to talk and interact with the children and they worked to incorporate these habits. Changing the way one talks is not easy, so this is a skill that will need to be continually developed and deliberately practiced.

Noah's behavior problems continued to escalate throughout the semester which unfortunately confirms what the research says about children whose nervous systems are unable to filter out stimulation resulting in an inability to survive in a traditional early childhood environment. He is now in an early childhood special education classroom with 10 children, a teacher, teacher's assistant, and a one-on-one aide. Perhaps the one-on-one aide could have been tried in Tess and Irma's class so he could have remained in a familiar environment with established relationships. Then, if that didn't work, he could have been moved him to a more restrictive environment.

It is important that we focus on children's behaviors without stereotyping. Yes, Noah did exhibit characteristics of prenatal drug exposure, but it will never be known if that was the cause of his problems and really makes not difference in how teachers work to meet his needs. The most critical thing is to address the behaviors of children needing low stimulus environments and

determine how educators can best meet the needs of children by making environmental adaptations and perfecting their interaction skills.

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